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The Stewardship of Money

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The New Emphasis The Church has come back at last to the emphasis of Jesus—the Kingdom of God, Christianity does not mean a few good folks meeting for fellowship and worship. It does not mean keeping up the church. It does not mean “saving” a few folks for another world. It means a new world here, where the will of God shall be done for the good of men in home and state and business. That is the new idea which is back of Foreign Missions and the Men and Religion Movement and Social Service, and all the great Christian facts of this age. The church is here for that end. Christ came to that end. That is the meaning of the ages. And to that end every Christian, so far as he is really Christian, is pledged with life and substance.

Life as a Stewardship That means a new conception of the Christian life. It is not going to church and keeping certain commandments and so getting to heaven because we have “been faithful.” It means life as a trust, a stewardship. That is Jesus’ idea of being faithful, which we have so pitifully narrowed. He does not talk of being faithful to a creed or a commandment, but of being faithful in what has been committed to us. Life is not just a probation which ends in reward or punishment in another world. It is a power and a possession which we are to use. God has made us working partners in His plans for the world. The New Testament word is stewardship. A modern word would be partnership or trusteeship.

The Stewardship of Time This stewardship has many sides. There is the stewardship of time. Not one day in seven belongs to God, but all days. How can I use my time so that it will count most for God’s great end? A leading young business man

of an eastern city told the writer that he was making his plans so that he might some day give half his time to distinctive Christian work. Another in that same city is giving two-thirds of his time to such service. A third, the head of a large corporation, is not too busy to travel across the continent for a missionary convention, or to care year in and year out for a great Sunday School in a downtown district. And these men all give as a minimum a tenth to a fifth of their income.

The Stewardship of Business There is the stewardship of business, not how we spend our money, but how we make it. This does not mean simply being honest or keeping within the law. The new world, or God's kingdom, is to be a world in which justice and love for men are to be found in the shop and on the street as they are in heaven. Is our business being done that way? That is a big part of Christian stewardship. It is the very first part. God wants to know how we make our money before he asks how we spend it. How we use our time in business comes first with Him before He asks how we use the remaining hours. Better fewer libraries from steel magnates and not so many men in the mills working twelve hours a day and seven days in the week. We need social justice before we need gifts for charities or missions. Jesus is the silent partner in every Christian's business.

The Stewardship of Money Then there is the stewardship of money. This leaflet belongs to this subject. But the subject needs the larger setting if it is to be understood in a Christian way. The fundamental fact here is not tithing, but stewardship. It is not the sway of an ancient law, but the fact of a life. It is not the gift of a fraction, but God's sovereignty over the whole. Just now the church has no bigger need than to have Christian men face this question.

Some Facts Here are some facts which make this question a pressing one today:

(1) Wealth is increasing rapidly in this

country. Thirty thousand millions is the amount produced each year. Christian men have a large share of this.

(2) The power of money for good was never greater. Fifteen millions will stamp out tuberculosis in New York, says one expert. Think what a million would do in China or Korea today! God uses human power and waits upon it. Money is simply stored-up human power, ready to be used in any field.

(3) The world has never seen such opportunities for Christian investment. Here at home a nation still in the forming, the peoples of the earth at our gates, the church face to face with great tasks and a great program. Looking abroad, we see open highways with multitudes, open hearts, great nations in transition, and messengers at home ready to be sent and native workers yonder waiting to help.

(4) The church is standing still instead of leaping forward. At home our strength is consumed in discussing "finances" instead of being rallied for a great aggressive movement. Abroad, where nations are waiting to surrender to their Lord, we are calling off the troops. And the church of the God of all the earth stands apologetic and suppliant while it asks for a little of that wealth of which the whole belongs to its Lord!

A Creed for Christian Stewards What do we need? Not more collections. Not fewer collections. We need a generation of Christian men who will understand the plain truth about the stewardship of money. What is this truth? We might put it into a creed for Christian stewards. I believe that:

(1) My money is mine only in trust. It belongs to God, just as I do.

(2) This money is not filthy lucre. It is not the devil's coin. It is stored-up human power. It is so much of myself which I can set at work in China or India or New York or Colorado.

(3) God is counting upon this money for His work. It is to build His churches and preach

His gospel, train His workers and send them out, teach and heal and save His children, and help bring in a new kingdom of righteousness and brotherhood and peace.

(4) To spend my income rightly is one of my first tasks as a Christian. Until I settle this my prayers and confessions will be like saying "Lord, Lord" and not doing the will of my Father.

(5) I should set aside a proportion of my income for the church and the service of others. I must do this to guard against my own selfishness. I must do this because it is businesslike. Giving by impulse and without system does not accord with the importance of this work.

(6) I should give for these ends not less than one-tenth of my income, and should increase this proportion as I am able. The Jews started with one-tenth as a minimum. I am receiving far more from God than they did and the call of His work is far greater in this age. I cannot begin with less. I ought to give more if I am able.

(7) I should invest this money for God as carefully as in my temporal business and keep strict account of this fund. I should study the church and its work that I may give wisely. I should give systematically. I should pray with my giving.

Results for the Church What would it mean for the church to have a generation of Christian men adopt this creed?

The church would be set free for the real task of saving and serving men.

We could face a bigger program and have resources to back it up.

We could at once double our forces in city and frontier and foreign field and the church would mark the greatest advance of its history since Paul took an empire for his parish.

What would such giving mean for Christian men?

The Meaning for Life It would mean moral victory. We have slurred over the passages in which Jesus has pointed out the peril

of money. He made it one of the two great dangers in the Christian life—the love of the world and the fear of the world. There are multitudes of Christian men whom God has prospered who are actually giving a less percentage of their income today than ten or twenty years ago. It hurts them to give what they do. They are in danger as real as the drunkard or gambler, and more subtle. A fixed proportion set definitely aside means a moral victory.

It would mean freedom and joy in giving. The Lord loveth a cheerful giver, but there are many people to whom giving is more like pulling a tooth. Benjamin Adams of sainted name wrote on "The Fun of Giving." Set a proportion apart once for all. You will find such freedom and joy in the spending of it that you will want to increase the amount.

It would mean a richer spiritual life. There is only one method of spiritual growth. That is fellowship with God. And here is a fellowship in the one thing that is most like God and that He cares most about—in giving and loving and serving. Indeed, there is no salvation at all without this. Salvation is just another word for life. And Jesus knows no other kind of life or salvation than this: "Except a grain of wheat fall in the ground and die it abideth alone. He that would save his life shall lose it." I know one man in an eastern city whose friends have seen his life grow each year richer and stronger, broader in sympathy and larger in vision, because his giving has put him in touch with the noblest spirits and the greatest movements in his city, his country, and round the world. It has been an unsurpassed education. Shall not the revival for which we pray come this way, not in big tabernacles and crowds and statistics, but in the larger life of this spirit of Christ filling His church and His people?

For these principles and statements there are many witnesses.

Some Witnesses Here is the letter of a noble layman who serves equally with time and money: "I am glad to bear testimony

to the enrichment of my own spiritual life through systematic giving. For several years I have kept an entirely separate bank account which I call the "Lord's Account." In that account I deposit every month one-fifth of my income. In that way I divest my mind entirely of any need to consider whether I can give or not, leaving only the question of the objects to be chosen. The giving has already been done. The above method I adopted after talking it over with my wife. It has proven to be a great blessing to us both."

William P. Hartley, manufacturer and Primitive Methodist layman of England, says: "Probably the greatest event of my life occurred on January 1, 1877. On that day my wife and I made a written vow that we would devote a definite share of our income for religious and humanitarian work, and that this should be a first charge. Since that date we have often increased the proportion, so that the original percentage is left far behind. As our income has increased, we have felt that religious and humanitarian work had a greater claim upon us. The distribution of the Lord's portion has been the greatest joy of my life and a real means of grace. It has kept me in constant touch with the promotion of Christ-like work of all kinds, and anything I have been able to do for Christ and humanity (including profit-sharing with my work-people for over twenty years) has grown out of the vow made thirty-three years ago. When a great church conference rose to do this man reverence, he simply said: "Of thine own have I given thee, Lord." His proportion has increased in these years from one-tenth to one-third.

And to whom does the Lord speak by this word? He speaks to you, my brother. You have no millions, but have you less than the widow with her mite? Between two native converts on the mission field this talk took place:

"If you had a hundred sheep, would you give fifty of them for the Lord's work?"

"Yes, I would."

"Would you do the same if you had a hundred cows?"

"Yes, I would."

"Would you do the same if you had a hundred horses?"

"Yes, I would."

"If you had two pigs, would you give one of them to Him?"

"No, I wouldn't; and you have no right to ask me when you know I have two pigs."

The Lord's chief need is not great gifts. It is men who own his lordship in business and time and money. Humble folks and rich folks, for their sake and the world's sake He wants them all.